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Week of
November 15, 1943

New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

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†*"I'll Take the High Road" opened Tuesday, November 9th, at the Ritz Theatre.*
†*"Goodbye Again" opened Tuesday, November 9th, at the New Amsterdam Roof.*
†*"What's Up" opened Thursday, November 11th, at the National Theatre.*

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"What's Up"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 12, 1943

So Cute You Could Spank It

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ABOUT most shows this season one's only wish is that they had never occurred to their authors. Last night's show at least reaches the level of making one wish that something could have been done about it. A pint-sized musical comedy consisting of a dozen nice girls and boys plus Jimmy Savo, *What's Up* has plenty of youth and friendliness to offer. Unfortunately it knows it and—having very little else in its kit—plays them up for ten times what they're worth. The result is so painfully, so epically cute, that by the end of the evening I would have welcomed a hatchet-faced old maid or a besotted old man.

The show has to do with some Army youngsters and an Asiatic potentate (Mr Savo) who drop in on a girls' finishing school just in time to be quarantined when one of the girls develops measles. The young people pair off and the potentate wanders around, and that's about all there is to the plot. Which is rather a point in its favor. But there's not much more to the book, put together as it is with jokes of one syllable and an occasional double entendre. Nor is there anything very imposing about the music. One or two tunes are pleasant enough, but most of them sound alike and out of the past, at that.

So *What's Up* has to play its kid stuff for win, place and show. Sometimes the boys and girls toss pillows around the room; sometimes they crawl in and out of the furniture and up and down the stairs; sometimes they're rhythmically drying dishes; sometimes they're dancing on top of beds. They sing songs couple by couple, and dance them by fours, eights and twelves. And for a first-act curtain, one lovesick young lady, thinking F. D. R. hasn't enough to do as it is, phones the White House and makes him play Miss Lonely-hearts.

Jimmy Savo breaks in on them every so often with pantomime that is sometimes amusing; but he too, unhappily, is sometimes cute.

The young people are fresh and pleasant, but seldom up to the triple burden of acting, singing and dancing. Don Weissmuller's tap is the best of the dance numbers and Mary-Roche's singing does the most for the tunes. George Balanchine has been inventive as all get out in his dance effects, but boarding-school capers are not his long suit and tiny choruses are not his best play.

'WHAT'S UP'

Musical comedy, featuring Jimmy Savo, Johnny Morgan and Gloria Warren; book by Alan Jay Lerner and Arthur Pierson; lyrics by Mr. Lerner; music by Frederick Loewe; staging by George Balanchine; presented at the National Theater by Mark Warnow, Thursday, November 11, 1943. The cast:

Jayne	Mary Roche
Susan	Pat Marshall
Eleanor	Mitzi Perry
Margaret	Lynn Gardner
Harriett Spinner	Claire Meade
Pamela	Honey Murray
Louise	Sondra Barrett
Martha	Sara Macon
May	Marjorie Beecher
Jennifer	Phyllis Hill
Doctor	Frank Kreig
Sergt. Willie Klink	Larry Douglas
Capt. Robert Lindsay	Rodney McLennan
Sergt. Henry Wagner	Jack Baker
2nd Lieut. Murray Bacchus	Robert Bay
1st Lieut. Ed Anderson	Don Weissmuller
Sergt. Moroney	Johnny Morgan
Judy	Helen Wenzel
Sergt. Dick Benham	William Tabbert
Virginia Miller	Gloria Warren
Rawa of Tanglinia	Jimmy Savo
Sergt. Jimmy Stevenson	Kenneth Buffett

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 12, 1943

What's Up, with Savo, Is First-Rate Fun

By BURTON RASCOE

WHEN Jimmy Savo, sitting cross-legged on the floor with a fez on his head and dressed below the neck like a prewar floorwalker with striped pants and cutaway, casually lifts a drape on a bed which is painted on a backdrop, you laugh. At least I did. And a lot of other people at the opening of the musical, What's Up, at the National last night laughed, too. I don't know why . . . It is just that Mr. Savo is not only what the ladies call a "sweet" sort of personality with the appeal of one's idea of a leprechaun but also that the man has an extraordinary sense of wacky satire in pantomine.

I have heard it said that Charlie Chaplin once stated that Mr. Savo is the greatest pantomine artist living. Mr. Chaplin ought to know what he is talking about; but he doesn't. Mr. Chaplin is the greatest pantomime artist living (as I see it) and Mr. Savo is a poor (and I am sure Mr. Savo would agree with me about this) second. But there is no third in this rating, since Toto died, out in Larchmont a few years ago. Mr. Savo is therefore actively, the first . . . It is regrettable that more demands are not made upon him in What's Up. He just comes on, now and then, and wows the audience and then he disappears.

Savo Satire

I intimated a moment ago that Mr. Savo is a satirist. Forget it and forgive me. To be a satirist you've got to dislike somebody or something. Mr. Savo is unhuman in that respect. He doesn't dislike anybody or anything—not even the agents, theater employees and other caretakers of his talent who come to him on his park bench in Central Park and tell him he should stop spending his time talking to squirrels and sparrows and get back to rehearsals.

Mr. Savo makes What's Up worth going to see, even if there weren't any other attractions. And, if you ask me, I could go to see What's Up 10 or 12 times, even if Mr. Savo weren't in it—just to listen and watch the tap dancing of a youngster named Don Weissmuller.

I shouldn't like to ask Mr. Astaire to look to his laurels, but I think Mr. Astaire would consider it a favor to have it called to his attention that there is a young man who is about to approach the grace of his ethereal grace-notes in tap dancing . . . Weissmuller is not perfect, yet; he clanged twice last night, with a heel stop that was racking; but his glissandos in tap were unearthly in cadence and precision . . . Mr. Weissmuller, by the way, won the most applause of the evening—and I am sure it wasn't a paid claque; for I applauded and nobody paid me anything.

Mr. Weissmuller has three adjutants in tap, who are almost as good as he is (and this is amazing in one show.) They are Sondra Barrett, Kenneth Buffett and Honey Murray . . . If the work of these youngsters is due to the drilling of George Balanchine, who staged the production, my hat is off to Mr. Balanchine.

Story Doesn't Matter

The book of any musical shouldn't bother you, as long as there is pace, comedy and brightness of song and dance; but, if you want to know, What's Up is something about some soldiers who are quarantined in a girls' finishing schoon near Washington. A boy and a girl are bethrothed in it, as I remember vaguely, but which ones or why I didn't bother to watch, since most of the girls in the show were fresh and young and pretty and marriageable, to say the least.

The hit songs of the show are Joshua and My Last Love, but there are others by the Messrs. Lener and Loewe which are eminently singable.

You didn't think there was anybody who looked exactly like those marvelous old dames created by Helen Hokinson, did you? . . . All right! Take a look at Claire Meade as Harriett Spinner, headmistress of the girls' school in this show. She's a Hokinson dame to the life. And what a dame she is in the show!

I recommend What's Up wholeheartedly if Mr. Savo will omit the curtain line in the first act. That curtain sounds as if Milton Berle had tossed in a suggestion.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 12, 1943

Fun With Savo

By HOWARD BARNES

A DERIVATIVE, but generally diverting musical show has moved into the National, to add a small quota of gaiety to theater-going. "What's Up" has enthusiastic performing, even though its head funny man, Jimmy Savo, is conspicuous by his absence from most of the scenes. It has been staged by George Balanchine with a nice sense of timing. If only the material in this Mark Warnow production had been a bit more inspired, it would have proved a genuine benison to a laggard season. As it stands it is likely to do quite nicely.

For a company of pleasant and proficient youngsters pulls everything but the old Indian rope trick to create the illusion that "What's Up" deserves an answer of plenty. Such nimble dancers as Phyllis Hill, Jack Baker, Don Weissmuller and Robert Bay trip the light fantastic with unaffected artistry. Johnny Morgan derives laughter from some tired comic sketches by the sheer fact that he is an engaging and funny fellow. The girls are good looking. They wear proper costumes for a musical farce in which an Army plane lands in a girl's seminary and the crew is pleasantly detained there by a case of measles. As a Savo fan, my chief quibble with "What's Up" is what's up when the great pantomimist is given almost nothing to do in the production.

• • •

There are one or two scenes that find him at the top of his form at the National. As a leering Rawa, who is being air-ferried to Washington, when a forced landing throws aviators and school girls into each others arms, he has a role which might have saved the book and business of "What's Up" from the tedious reiteration of antique japes which constantly threatens to smother the proceedings. For some strange reason, Alan Jay Lerner and Arthur Pierson, who composed the libretto, have left the comedian cooling his heels through too many second-hand sketches. On the whole, the performers in the piece have wasted no touch of talent in the writing or Frederick Loewe's score. The production itself has wasted the talents of its finest executant.

• • •

When Savo is going to bed at the school against a straight drop bulging with props, or is taking a lesson in English from a flyer who assures him that "thank you" and a comehither whistle constitute a complete vocabulary, "What's Up" really has plenty. It has when Miss Hill is pirouetting through scenes, or the several other knowing young players in the show take matters more or less into their own hands. It is only a pity that the newest musical offering on Broadway does not boast enough original and imaginative material to back up its company. "You've Got a Hold on Me" and "You Wash and I'll Dry" are fair to middling songs, but Mr. Warnow, as a celebrated conductor on the air waves, should have assembled better songs and sketches for his debut as a stage impresario.

"What's Up"

NEW YORK TIMES
November 12, 1943

A Group of Young People Sing and Dance the Measures of 'What's Up' at the National

By LEWIS NICHOLS

NO doubt it is only an habitual pessimist who can look at "What's Up" and find it not altogether to his liking. All the elements of a Broadway musical show are there. The tunes are fairly catchy, Jimmy Savo—who undoubtedly is among the great folk of the world—is present, and the cast otherwise is made up of young people who are alike fresh and eager. But as it went on last evening at the National Theatre under the auspices of Mark Warnow, "What's Up" seemed curiously lacking as a finished product for the region of Times Square.

The chief trouble probably lies in the book, which Alan Jay Lerner and Arthur Pierson contributed. No one expects a musical comedy book to rank as high literature—although one or two have—but something a little this side of embarrassing does no harm. "What's Up" is all right when it is tap dancing or singing, but when it settles down to conversation, the entire course of the world seems to slow down until it has finished. Had the show remained elsewhere until the book had grown up a bit, the story this morning might well have been somewhat different.

It would be a pleasure to have it so, for the cast is in there trying at every minute and obviously is having the time of its life. There is an extremely pretty girl with a good voice, Mary Roche, to sing a number of songs, and Gloria Warren from the movies and Lynn Gardner to sing others. There are dances by Robert Bay, Phyllis Hill, Jack Baker and some more, with George Balanchine, who was the general director, to see they go off all right. Mr. Savo is, of course, a world to himself, but one of the disappointments of the show is that he has not a great deal to do. Jimmy would have been a lot more help had he been able to stop the proceedings for a time and ask the river to stay 'way from his door.

Frederick Loewe wrote the music, the tunes being agreeable rather than outstanding. One called "Joshua" is a good number and "How Time Flies" and "You've Got a Hold on Me," to which Mr. Lerner has attached lyrics which are not particularly outstanding. Boris Aronson has done a good job with the settings and Grace Houston with the costumes. If somebody only had bothered to do something about a book which concerns the crew of an airplane, plus an Indian potentate, being quarantined in a girl's school because of measles—and one girl, in love, calling the President to see what he could do about love. Perhaps the blame goes to That Man in the White House.

NEW YORK POST
November 12, 1943

"What's Up" in a Girl's School During an Eight-Day Quarantine

By WILELLA WALDORF

"WHAT'S UP," the new musical comedy presented by Mark Warnow last night at the National Theatre, is as pretty and sweet and self-consciously cute as a movie starlet, and just as vapid.

The young ladies playing students at Miss Langley's School for Girls, in fact, all looked so much like movie starlets that it was next to impossible to tell them apart, while the young gentlemen in uniform who made a forced landing at the School en route to Washington with the Rawa of Tanglinia and his interpreter as passengers, were a beautifully scrubbed and freshly pressed galaxy of airmen.

No sooner had they landed than one of the girls came down with measles and the house was quarantined for eight days. The boys and girls thereupon proceeded to frolic all over the place, dancing over the beds and tables, playfully pretending to wash paper dishes, singing and dancing, then reversing the process and dancing and singing.

President Gives Advice To the Lovelorn

Early in the evening a determined, if somewhat coy, effort was made to introduce some dirt into the proceedings, but the off-color motif faded out as rapidly as some of the voices, and from then on it was up to George Balanchine to think up some new twirls to garnish Frederick Loewe's tunes, which are pretty and sweet and, like the ingenues, a little hard to tell apart.

The only girl on the stage who was not supposed to be a student of Miss Langley's School was Gloria Warren, who played the Rawa of Tanglinia's interpreter. Miss Warren was a little mouse of a miss in an ill-fitting suit until she had a talk with President Roosevelt on the phone and told him she was in love with one of the airmen who wouldn't even look at her.

What should she do about it, she asked the President.

Well, even President Roosevelt isn't too busy to see a movie now and then.

Soon after consulting the White House on this intimate subject, Miss Warren blossomed out in a purple evening gown with silver what-nots running all over it and became at the same time a coloratura soprano, the kind that usually operates with flute accompaniment and occasionally takes a very high note that sounds like the whistle on a peanut stand.

This sudden metamorphosis so enraptured the reluctant airman that he immediately proposed.

The unhappy task of trying to introduce a little humor during the quarantine fell to Jimmy Savo and Johnny Morgan.

Mr. Savo, as the Rawa of Tanglinia, conversed almost entirely in gibberish, and managed to be fairly amusing in a scene or two devoted to his familiar pantomime. If "What's Up" is ever remembered for anything, though, it will be celebrated as the show in which Mr. Savo did not once lose his trousers. They were fancy gray-striped trousers and they stayed up.

Mr. Morgan is a droll fellow with a mouth almost as large as Joe E. Brown's who kept giving us the impression that he was going to work up to something genuinely hilarious, only to be thwarted by his lines.

Most of the dancing was pleasant, if a little monotonous—after all, they were quarantined for eight days—and Phyllis Hill, a graceful ballerina, knew her way about the stage. The scholastic singing among the young ladies was led by Mary Roche, who has picked up a flock of mannerisms somewhere, while a young thing named Honey Murray displayed an impish personality amid the cake-frosting.

Boris Aronson's sets fitted in prettily with the Valentine's Day quality of the production.

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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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"What's Up"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 12, 1943

Jimmy Savo in a One-Man Dream Ballet the the Best of 'What's Up'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MARK WARNOW'S new musical at the National Theatre, "What's Up," is youthful, very pleasant and almost always polite, and it will be more fun when it is shortened and has a little more Jimmy Savo in it.

I hope I'm not putting a curse on the venture by using the words "pleasant" and "nice" instead of something like "sock" and "wow," but these are the words to use. The girls, who are supposed to be young things in a girls' school, are young things who are pretty, pleasant and nice.

Into this layout come the crew of an army transport and their two passengers, the Rawa of Tanglinia (Mr. Savo) and his interpreter, Gloria Warren. Although Mr. Savo, potentate of a friendly foreign state, is on his way to see F. D. R., he has to stop off at the school for eight days after the plane crashes because one of the girls has measles and the joint is quarantined.

Funny Dream Ballet

Simple enough plot to hang a show on—if only it weren't hung so loosely. The high spot is when Jimmy Savo follows the current Broadway musical fashion by having his own dream ballet with just one girl, Phyllis Hill. The girl is the usual will-o'-the-wisp in a ballet skirt, and Jimmy is forever pursuing her. But she's a big girl, toe-dancing most of the time, and Jimmy, a little guy, has to keep lugging a chair around so he can stand on it and clutch at his dream. It is a really funny number, staged by George Balanchine.

Savo, the tramp pantomimist, has forsaken his great sagging pants and size 25 collar for a snappy set of striped trousers and a morning coat, not to mention a fez and a gold lorgnette. He slithers around, ogling girls, talking Tanglinian and performing small feats of magic. He is and always will be a heart-warming comedian. I just wish he had a little more to do with the book.

A Vote for the Girls

The rest of it is boys and girls, about ten of each, and they can all sing and dance. The girls are simply and very intelligently costumed by Grace Houston, and the lady who goes to shows with me says there are some smart Junior Miss numbers on view. By numbers she meant clothes; by numbers I mean what goes inside clothes and I thought these were excellently designed, too.

The songs, by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, seem fresh and some times tuneful. The opening number, "Miss Langley's School for Girls," and another one, "You Wash and I'll Dry," are amusing. "You've Got a Hold on Me" is the show's bid for radio time. The orchestrations by Van Cleave are above average and so is Will Irwin's band.

Gloria Warren, who hauls the love and the torches around, is pretty and has an odd little voice given to modest trills and frills. Rodney McLennan, as an army pilot, has a clean-cut personality and an off-color song, "Girl Is Like a Book," which doesn't seem to fit the surroundings or the people. The rest of the men dance and sing all right and manage to look like soldiers, which is an achievement in view of the manpower shortage in Broadway musicals.

Two Dream Ballets

One young comedian, Johnny Morgan, has a pretty funny monologue about how to get a lady drunk, and he tries it on Claire Meade, the spinster M. P. of the school.

Mr Balanchine has cooked up a second dream ballet in which the army, in pajamas, dances with the schoolgirls, in their nighties. It's all right, in a gentle sort of way. Boris Aronson did the sets, and one, Savo's bedroom, is a witty job.

There is enough in "What's Up" for an amiable evening. It can have more dash if Mr. Warnow will shorten his song numbers and take some tucks in the dialogue. This will give Mr. Savo some more room.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 12, 1943

'What's Up' Brings Up Jimmy Savo As Star

By ROBERT GARLAND

TODAY'S news from Broadway is neither very, very good nor very, very bad. Betwixt and between, let's call it! "What's Up," which Mark Warnow brought last night into the National Theatre, turns out to be a song-and-dance concoction in which the girl's boarding school really IS a girls' boarding school; in which the boys installed therein are members of the American Army Air Corps rather than football players.

In other, and plainer, words, "What's Up" is a sort of "Early to Bed" in reverse. And without the Ziegfeldian scenery, costumes and girls which make the piece at the Broadhurst outstanding.

Not that the piece at the National hasn't scenery, costumes and girls. There are plenty. But the scenery by Boris Aronson, the costumes by Grace Houston and the girls by Mother Nature lack the beauty and distinction of the "Early to Bed," of which "What's Up" continuously reminds you. Because of this, you're left holding the oversexed plot in your theatre-going lap. It grows heavy as the scenes go on.

Men-Crazy Girls

The legend is that an uncertain Miss Langley conducts a school for girls somewhere in America. These young ladies—Jayne, Susan and Eleanor; Margaret, Pamela and Louise, May, Martha and Jennifer—think, talk and dream about nothing but men. Morning, noon and night, the male of the species is uppermost in the thoughts of these precocious pupils. The mere mention of a man drives a scholar to distraction.

So imagine what happens when an Army transport plane makes a forced landing in the virginal back yard of this warm and worried seminary. You're right. And with a vengeance!

Before you can say "Sigmund Freud," or even "Havelock Ellis," Capt. Lindsay, Lts. Anderson and Bacchus, Sgts. Wagner, Benham, Stevenson, Moroney and Klink have gotten out, gotten in, and taken the place by storm. Accompanying them is the Rawa of Tanglinia—Tanglinia being a kingdom halfway between Graustark and Zenda. Then, pop comes the measles! The school, the pupils and the Air Force are quarantined together.

Question of Savo

Turning to the cast, there are two distinct schools of thought about Jimmy Savo. Now, in 41st Street, Jimmy plays the Rawa of Tanglinia by using two, and only two, English words. There are those to whom Mr. Savo can do no wrong. He is the funniest man alive, and that is that, and no fooling. There are others to whom Mr. Savo, like Ed Wynn, olives, caviar and Red Skelton, is a taste to be acquired.

For season after season, I've tried—heaven knows I've tried— to find Mr. Savo as amusing as many first-night neighbors do. But I just can't do it, try as I may, try as I do.

The majority of the cast are recruits and refugees from radio, night clubs, vaudeville, Hollywood and opera. They work hard and earnestly, and I wish that the results of their labors were more rewarding. And there's a song called "You Got a Hold on Me" which, melodious as it is, puts me in mind of something out of "This Is the Army." "What's Up?" asks a distinct question. The distinct answer is—Jimmy Savo! He's up to you.

NEW YORK SUN
November 12, 1943

"What's Up," at the National, Has New Faces and Some Zestful Dance Numbers

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THINGS were somewhat better last evening at the National. An agreeable but not an eventful musical comedy, "What's Up," bringing forth some new and bright young performers, bustled into the playhouse that has been given over in bygone years to everything from "Cyrano de Bergerac" to the heroics of "Silence" (H. B. Warner).

The National's new tenant is boy-and-girl musical comedy in the George Abbott tradition. It has some nice songs, fast dances, pretty girls, and the sad-faced, round-eyed, gnomelike Jimmy Savo in the role of the Rawa of Tanglinia. This grotesque and eye-rolling potentate, along with officers and men of a United States Army plane, are quarantined for a spell in the dormitory of a girls' school in Virginia, after their craft has made a forced landing on the grounds, and there you have the book of "What's Up."

The quarantine idea has had previous and notably successful service in Broadway theatricals (it was certainly fun in "Seven Days," of fond and distant memory), but every now and then, as the book of "What's Up" is about to get you down, a dance number, and a good one, will come zestfully to the rescue.

The cast is as acrobatic as it is youthful. Some of the most attractive of the girls are making their first Broadway appearances. The boys are nimble enough for anybody's T formation, and it has been Director George Balanchine's effort to keep the show moving for most of the evening. The production has been well designed by Boris Aronson and many of the stage effects are ingeniously contrived and effectively presented.

Now take Mr. Savo. I have never been one overwhelmed by the drolleries of this reformed juggler, but I concede that he has a large and definite following. He again acts with his feet and his eyes, mostly his eyes, and is quite a sight in the get-up of the Rawa of faraway Tanglinia, being borne to Washington by Army flyers. But he has surprisingly little to do. Probably his best number is the ballet danced with lovely young Phyllis Hill.

"What's Up" brings forth such new young people as Johnny Morgan, Gloria Warren, Lynn Gardner, Pat Marshall, Rodney McLennan, and the very pretty Mary Roche. Johnny Morgan is an agreeable performer but his material isn't particularly brisk. Miss Warren has a pleasant voice and stage presence. There are several song and dancers numbers that are all right—probably better than that. . . . "Joshua," "You've Got a Hold On Me," "You Wash and I'll Dry." The group of flyers is probably as agile as any you'll find this side of—well, say "Winged Victory."

Mark Warnow, in presentting this new show at the National, makes his debut as a Broadway producer. If you like some pleasant songs, bounding dance numbers and fresh-looking girls, and don't mind a book bringing on a deadly lull now and then, you'll have a good time at "What's Up." . . . Cole Porter did, and George Abbott probably would.

"I'll Take the High Road"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 10, 1943

Hayman and Berle Present 'High Road'

By ROBERT GARLAND

A playwright by the name of Prumbs is responsible for the negligible little number Clifford Hayman and Milton Berle fetched last night into the Ritz Theatre. Miss Lucille Prumbs! According to the chatty program, that lady is one of the more attractive, as well as one of the "youngest" of the local dramatists. This well may be, and I have no cause to doubt it. I only wish that I could add that she is also one of the most interesting and expert.

But she isn't, as "I'll Take the High Road" is my witness. She isn't that, even if—as that chatty program goes on to state—she did sit down and write her first play at the age of eighteen. She still isn't, even if the current offering is her eighth. And she still isn't if she does spend eight hours a day writing, the remaining sixteen being devoted to reading, play or movie-going, swimming and knitting. It might be a good idea if Miss Prumbs stuck to her knitting.

"I'll Take the High Road" is almost as chatty as its program. For the first of its three acts it wanders in, out and around the living-dining room of the Budd homestead, in Masondale, Long Island. The hour is 7 in the morning, and the Budds—Ma Budd, Pa Budd, Floyd Budd, Sam Budd and Judy Budd—are all up bright and early. Not that they're going anywhere until 9 o'clock that evening, when there's a motion picture premiere at the local theatre.

This motion picture has to do with a Masondale Fascist who owns the local airplane factory. This Nazi-minded big shot is a menace to America. Not only this, but he is at the same time harboring a saboteur who is wanted by the FBI for some very good reason. So Judy, of the house of Budd, and our heroine, denounces him from the stage of the Masondale Theatre, backed up by her uncle, who is a liberal, and the star of the motion picture which is having its world premiere.

If this sounds confused and more than a bit uncalled-for, that's nothing to how it sounds when enlarged upon and spoken out loud in 48th st. If hearing is believing, the Budds are great ones for talking. So are their friends, relatives and visitors. Nowadays, at the Ritz, no one ever uses one word when four will do. And, long after "I'll Take the High Road" is over and done with the Budds, their friends, relations and visitors, keep right on talking.

A cast, of which Jim Cagney's attractive sister, Jeanne, is the head, does what it can with Playwright Prumbs' material. This isn't a great deal! The most successful are Len Doyle, who brings Uncle Sam Budd to life whenever there is the slightest opportunity, and Leo Chalzel, who is credible and frequently amusing as a motion picture director . . . But the truth is that "I'll Take the High Road" is a somewhat less than mediocre play, not very well presented.

NEW YORK POST
November 10, 1943

"I'll Take the High Road," or The Girl Patriot of Mansonville

By WILELLA WALDORF

SOME years ago when the Theatre Union occupied the old Fourteenth Street Theatre, a play was produced there with the aid of a blackboard. Although the context was anything but abstruse, the management was so afraid the audience wouldn't understand what was going on that it explained every scene as it came along.

For instance, if an actor cast in the role of Johnny was supposed to beat an actress playing his mother, the scene was duly acted out and in case anybody in the theatre missed the point, the blackboard was brought in bearing the statement: "Johnny beats his mother."

By this time nearly everybody had a suspicion Johnny and his mother weren't on very good terms.

"I'll Take the High Road," the new play by Lucille Prumbs which opened last night at the Ritz Theatre, does not actually employ a blackboard, but still manages to give the impression that it is all going on in the third grade.

Miss Prumbs, who once wrote a play called "Five Alarm Waltz" which tried vainly to poke fun at Saroyan, is concerned in "I'll Take the High Road" with Fascism in America.

Judy Budd, chief telephone operator at the Manson Aircraft plant at Mansondale, L. I., overhears evidence that old man Manson himself is tied up with a notorious seditionist wanted by the F.B.I. But Manson is not only the god of Mansondale but such a noble figure in the national war effort that a documentary film has actually been made based on his life.

Judy, chosen "Miss Average Girl," is to represent the Manson workers at the gala premiere, escorted by Corp. Stuart Charters, a Hollywood idol loaned by the Army to appear in the picture. Corp. Charters turns out to be just a nice Polish boy from Avenue A whose father is a butcher. Urged on by Judy's right-thinking uncle, they smash up the movie opening by denouncing Manson from the platform before the film can be shown.

Miss Prumbs' primer for patriots is spelled out for three acts in a second-rate stock company manner by a troupe that contains a number of individuals who could probably do much better in something else, but whose efforts to appear adult are continually thwarted by Miss Prumbs' adolescent writing and the elementary direction of Sanford Meisner.

"I'll Take the High Road" is produced at the Ritz by Clifford Hayman and Milton Berle, the same Milton Berle who appears in the "Ziegfeld Follies" nightly at the Winter Garden. Is this just another of his gags?

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 10, 1943

I'll Take the High Road Hits New Drama Low

By BURTON RASCOE

THERE have been some pretty bad plays offered on Broadway from time to time, but I'll Take the High Road, which opened at the Ritz, is downright moronic.

If this infantile absurdity had any power to arouse the passions of the emotionally unstable (which I doubt) it might conceivably have some harmful results.

For its message is the hysterical one that any president of a company engaged in turning out airplanes or other war materials in record-breaking production schedules is open to suspicion of being a "Fascist," whose every move should be watched by his employees.

Conceivably some shallow-pated girls, temporarily working in munitions plants, on seeing Jeanne Cagney, as a telephone operator, unmask the Fascistic false hero, her employer, and winning the love thereby of the season's most popular juvenile film star, might be inspired to profit likewise, shirk their work in the more thrilling pursuits of female Hawkshaws, create fabulous suspicions, start infamous rumors and gum up the works, even if only momentarily, of a whole war plant.

'Till She Grows Up

Lucille Prumbs, the author, is only about 20 years old, according to the program notes, and she had already written eight plays, including Five-Alarm Waltz, which opened and closed quick in March, 1941. This was a brazen and misguided attempt to put William Saroyan into a farce as an object of ridicule. Some one should take away her pencil until she grows up.

Her head, at present, is filled with the most idiotic guff, pumped up by the big-and-quick-money patrioteers who are looked at askance and with a little disgust by their saner and more sensible colleagues in the radio, motion picture and theatrical world. She obviously believes that, with the exception of Henry J. Kaiser (an exception frequently noted in her play last night) all presidents of companies engaged in war work are probably "Fascists" and that their plants should be taken over by the government. She doesn't make clear what she believes a "Fascist" to be, but, in one long, maudlin speech which Len Doyle was required to deliver, she obviously thinks that pre-Pearl Harbor "isolationists" and "Fascists" are one and the same thing.

Let the misguided Miss Prumbs be informed that thousands of pre-Pearl Harbor "isolationists" are fighting this war, and I mean fighting it, in the swamps, jungles, on land, the sea and in fighting planes—not before the mike or behind a movie director's megaphone.

Dull and Silly

Her dull and silly play is about a telephone operator in an airplane factory whose boss, because of his war production record and his long-established reputation as a benevolent employer, founder and chief ornament of Mansondale, L. I., is made the subject of an inspirational film, the world premiere of which is to be held in Mansondale. The operator has suspicions about her employer and spills them the night she is to be escorted to the theater by the young star of the film. Her boss is arrested by the FBI and his plant taken over by the government, on what charge it is never made clear. Although engaged to a local boy, she falls in love with the star and promises to wait for him until he returns from the wars. Time is consumed for the three acts by various vulgarities.

Jeanne Cagney is pretty and cute but her acting last night consisted in making with the eyes and brows like someone with a troubling secret. The others were good average stock-company players.

"I'll Take the High Road"

NEW YORK SUN
November 10, 1943

'I'll Take the High Road,' Tiresome Little Number, Opens at Ritz Theater

By WARD MOREHOUSE

A tiresome and juvenile bit of theater called "I'll Take the High Road," written by Lucille Prumbs, strayed into the Ritz Theater last evening under the joint sponsorship of Clifford Hayman and Milton Berle. The producers apparently saw values of a problem play in the script, but the play never comes off.

It's all about one Judy Budd, chief telephone operator of a Long Island aircraft plant, who exposes the big boss as pro-Nazi, as an American Fascist. Judy and most of the others talk about him pretty steadily all evening, but he never makes an appearance.

The characters in "I'll Take the High Road" are sketchy, the direction is plodding and the acting indifferent. Jeanne Cagney has spirit and enthusiasm and I'd like to see her try a better part. Her present one is almost embarrassing.

Len Doyle, Wanda Lyon, James Elliott, Leo Chalzel and Michael Strong are among the players. Miss Prumbs has ideas and is extraordinarily industrious. She may yet write a play; "I'll Take the High Road" isn't it.

This is a strange season. Incredible things are happening at the box office. But if "I'll Take the High Road" begins selling out by Friday night I will insist upon a revival of "Hairpin Harmony."

'I'LL TAKE THE HIGH ROAD'

Play by Lucille Prumbs; staging by Sanford Meisner; settings by Paul Morrison; presented by Clifford Hayman and Milton Berle at the Ritz Theatre Tuesday, November 9, 1943. The cast:

Ma Budd	Wanda Lyon
Sam Budd	Len Doyle
Pa Budd	John McGovern
Floyd Budd	Allan Rich
Theresa Packett	Ethel Remey
Judy Budd	Jeanne Cagney
Mrs. Hale	Angela Willard
Beaver	John Bradley
Cissy	Mona Graham
Kewpie	Billy Sands
United Parcel	Lester Lonergan
MacNaughton	Betty Kelley
Western Union	James Elliott
Rafferty	Leslie MacLeod
Keenan	Ben Laughlin
Joe Kindle	Larry Hugo
Ed	Gordon Hammill
Corp. Stuart Charters	Michael Strong
V. Poniakoff	Leo Chalzel
Manager	G. Swayne Gordon

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 10, 1943

'I'll Take High Road' Wanders Hither and Yawn, but Nowhere

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"I'll TAKE THE HIGH ROAD" is a loftily titled little play which wanders around with great good intent but doesn't get anywhere in particular. It's about a girl (Jeanne Cagney) who unmasks a potent enemy of the country. It is also about a middle class American home, family squabbles, a movie actor, a movie director and the War Effort. Yet, with all these ingredients, there isn't much in it.

Lucille Prumbs is the author and Milton Berle is co-producer with Clifford Hayman. This marks Mr. Berle's debut as a manager and it may also mark that unabashed young comedian's first acquaintance with a sense of frustration; for the play can't manage to do what it wants to do.

The setting is the aforesaid middle class American home—or a playwright's idea of same. To a playwright, a middle class American home has awful decorations and is overcrowded with in-laws who are mad at each other. And the men never wear jackets or neckties. This particular house is in Manisondale, L. I., a town owned by a factory tycoon named Manson who is now building airplanes.

Unmasking a Saboteur

A documentary film of the great man's life, with a real Hollywood star, is about to have its World Premeer in Mansondale and Miss Cagney, having been elected Miss Average Girl by the boss, is to make a speech as the deputy of all the factory workers. In a manner which you need not be troubled with, she discovers that the boss is really a high class saboteur and the protector of a Fascist the FBI is hunting. So her speech turns out to be a dramatic denouncement.

Maybe Alfred Hitchcock and seventeen screenwriters could have made something out of this, but Playwright Prumbs has let many things distract her.

It's a Big Cast, Anyhow

In a fairly large cast there are a tough-cracking kid brother, a father who yaps at his wife, a mother who yaps at her husband, an uncle who is a chuckling philosopher (like some guy who used to try to sell me pipe tobacco on the radio), a spinster aunt, a movie star who has to tell the story of his life, a director who talks like Gregory Ratoff and twelve other characters who are presented as "characters."

Some of the performances are pleasant enough, with Miss Cagney (Jim's sister) quietly straightforward as the heroine. Len Doyle is the philosopher, Allan Rich the brother, Michael Strong the zombie actor and Leo Chalzel, very actory, the director. There are many bits which get laughs, but the exciting parts aren't very exciting.

Setting by Paul Morrison, direction by Sanford Meisner, money by Clifford Hayman and Milton Berle.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 10, 1943

Detour

By HOWARD BARNES

THE problem of Fascists in our present midst is dramatized with great gusto and little skill in "I'll Take the High Road." Veering rather aimlessly between domestic farce and heroism on the home front, this new play by Lucille Prumbs is neither entertaining nor instructive. It is quite possible that the author's principal contention that it takes a telephone operator and a movie star who has gone into the Army to unmask a Quisling head of a defense plant is valid. At the Ritz Theater it shapes up as a muddled and highly ineffectual show.

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Even with the stalwart acting of Jeanne Cagney and some effective bits by Len Doyle, Billy Sands and Leo Chalzel, the production is always either pulling its punches or throwing haymakers. Miss Prumbs must have believed very sincerely in her plot. She must have felt a certain pride in calling attention to possible treason in high places and reminding defense workers that they should be alert to turn industrial Benedict Arnolds over to the F.B.I. One shudders to think of what might happen, though, if spectators took her cue for patriotic action too seriously.

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Like most bad plays, the second act is the best in "I'll Take the High Road." This finds an average Long Island family about to attend a documentary film premiere in which the defense worker daughter is to make one of those average speeches of appreciation after having been picked as Miss Average Defense Worker. Miss Prumbs has packed some good lines and a bit of solid characterization into this stanza of her fantasy. She has contrived some effective stage business as the heroine denounces the head of her plant, after overhearing his conversation with a Nazi agent.

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It is a tiny fillip of amusement and interest in a dreary charade. For even here there is the erstwhile movie star in uniform, who is about as ridiculous a character as ever stumbled into a theatrical street accident. I have known a good many celebrated film actors, in and out of the Army, but none remotely resembling the chap who helps the little telephone operator to turn in an American pro-Nazi werewolf. Miss Prumbs has written exuberantly, but with little sense of dramatic direction.

Miss Cagney and her assistants try their best to keep the play moving on a straight and cumulative line of excitement, but the last act has the whole company floundering as badly as the piece itself. Sanford Meisner's direction is of very little help. "I'll Take the High Road" would scarcely have come off with the most knowing ministrations.